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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE AND NEA/I;
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TAGS: PREL, PTER, PINR, MARR, MOPS, TU, IZ
SUBJECT: USF-I GENERAL ODIERNO'S COUNTER-PKK MEETING WITH
TURKEY'S INTER-AGENCY SECURITY AFFAIRS GROUP

Classified By: AMB James Jeffrey; reasons 1.4(b,d)

1. (S) SUMMARY: In a February 3 meeting with the top level of the Turkish inter-agency security affairs group, USF-I Commanding General Raymond Odierno agreed to develop an action plan to improve counter-terrorism pressure on the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Odierno suggested the plan's initial focus include interdiction of PKK funding and logistics and development of actionable arrest warrants against PKK leaders. Odierno reiterated U.S. support for the U.S.-Turkey-Iraq Trilateral Mechanism, lauded Turkey's broad-based counter-terrorism effort and agreed to consider requests for increased U.S. intelligence-collection assets to support this goal. Interior Minister Atalay declared the PKK harbor in northern Iraq the primary obstacle to realization of the common Turkish-American strategic vision for that country. He implied a disappointed Turkey would be prepared to act unilaterally against the PKK in Iraq. Odierno warned against unilateral military action and urged Turkey's respect for Iraqi sovereignty and Turkish coordination of cross-border operations with the GoI. In his meeting with TGS Chief of Staff GEN Basbug, Odierno said the U.S. and Turkey should work together to persuade Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) leaders the PKK is a threat not only to Turkey, but to Iraq. While the KRG would not engage in military operations against the PKK, it may be persuaded to take action against the terrorists' logistics and financial flows. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) On February 3, USF-I Commanding General Odierno visited Turkey to discuss ways to improve cooperation against the PKK. With Odierno were Ambassador Cameron Munter, Political-Military Minister Counselor for Embassy Baghdad, Major General Steven Hummer, USF-I Chief of Operations (J3) and Major General Ted Nicholas, USF-I Chief of Intelligence (J2). Inter-agency attendance on the Turkish side was unprecedented. Led by Turkish Minister of Interior Besir Atalay, the delegation included Deputy Chief of the Turkish General Staff General Aslan Guner, MFA Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioglu and Emre Taner, Turkish National Intelligence Organization Undersecretary.

3. (C) Atalay opened the February 3 delegations' meeting by declaring the terrorist PKK's harbor in northern Iraq the primary obstacle to realization of "our common strategic vision" for that country. Atalay recalled that, like the United States, Turkey is striving for a democratic, united

and fully sovereign Iraq, which serves as an anchor of stability in the region. He said Turkey is determined to stop the PKK terrorism, directed from Qandil, which defies that common vision. He reviewed his government's several lines of action against the PKK: cooperation with Syria against terrorist supporters there; diplomatic efforts to enlist European help in throttling PKK funding and propaganda flowing from Europe; the Democratic Opening, an evolving package of domestic economic development programs and ethnic rights concessions designed to reduce the alienation of some southeastern Turkish Kurds from their state, and; engagement with the Iraqi government and the KRG to remove the PKK leadership from Qandil. With regard to the last, Atalay said his December 21 meeting with KRG President Masoud Barzani in Erbil yielded a new and compelling affirmation of the latter's willingness to work with Turkey against the PKK as well as Barzani's promise to support a jointly developed Turkish-USFI "action plan" to eliminate the terrorist harbor in northern Iraq.

4. (C) A jointly developed action plan, Atalay said, is the GoT's central request of the United States for this meeting. That plan should be detailed, focused on separating reconcilable PKK members from irreconcilables and progressive in its escalation of pressure against the PKK leadership. Military force should be a last resort. Parenthetically, Atalay added, even a symbolic, but prominent, American endorsement of the plan's execution would generate important psychological pressure on the leadership. The plan should also facilitate the intimate involvement of the KRG in the campaign against the terrorists. In that regard, the plan's first steps should be the KRG's restraint of PKK leaders' movements to include denial of access to airports, and interdiction of the organization's logistics lines.

5. (C) Odierno welcomed Atalay's request, saying USF-I is ready to begin work on an action plan immediately with the GoI and KRG. He confirmed USF-I recognizes how serious a problem the PKK is for Turks; that the terrorists have executed deadly operations from northern Iraq into Turkey. He promised to coordinate the plan's development with Atalay. Odierno reviewed his most recent meeting with Barzani, who, he said, "wants to assist us" on the PKK problem. Recalling his several years of contacts with Barzani, Odierno continued, the KRG president now seems seized of the threat the continued PKK presence in northern Iraq represents to his interests. Odierno added Iraqi Prime Minister Malaki also wants to address the PKK problem and plans to raise it with Barzani.

6. (C) Noting he had already dispatched a USF-I team to the KRG to deepen his understanding of the PKK's organization and operations in northern Iraq, Odierno indicated he wanted to focus on the group's funding, both from within Iraq and from abroad. Speaking from experience, he said constricting a terrorist organization's funding is fundamental to curbing its operations. He also recommended the action plan develop a clear picture of the PKK's logistics lines, which may present low-risk high-outcome interdiction opportunities. Noting Iraq's ongoing effort to reconstitute itself under the rule of law, he suggested preparation of executable warrants to provide Iraqi authorities with a legal basis for arresting PKK leaders. Lauding the GoT's Democratic Opening, Odierno said Turkey had correctly identified the importance of the socio-economic context to dissuading "paid part-timers," who are not tied ideologically to the terrorists' cause, from engaging in contract work for the PKK. "These people can be reconciled." The goal then becomes isolating the true ideologues and rendering them ineffective. Odierno said the Erbil Trilateral Intelligence-Sharing Office (TISO) is already considering several of these issues. He offered for Atalay's consideration, expansion of the TISO, raising its Turkish representation to a more senior level and making it the primary venue for development of the action plan.

7. (S) Keying off Odierno's reference to reconcilables, Atalay said the KRG is considering offering an amnesty to PKK members willing to lay down arms. He speculated the GoT might be able to support such an offer and suggested the action plan focus on coaxing potential reconcilables "down from the mountain" so they can be reintegrated into northern Iraqi or Turkish society. He registered frustration with the Trilateral Mechanism (NOTE: The TISO is the intelligence-sharing sub-function of the Trilateral Mechanism, which, with USG facilitation, is intended to encourage Turkish and Iraqi cooperation against the PKK.), claiming Turkey had been unable to secure Iraqi support for the interdiction of PKK logistics and financing. He regretted the GoI's inability to secure Makhmour Camp, which "has become a base for the PKK," so that those of its

inhabitants who want to return to Turkey could do so without fear of terrorist reprisal. He stressed the importance of Odierno's personal engagement in drafting a "concrete" action plan with the KRG. He admitted: "We do not expect much from the Iraqi government; we expect a lot from Barzani and the KRG." He said, if Turkey cannot secure USG and KRG support against the PKK, Ankara is prepared to act unilaterally. Elaborating on this point, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioglu affirmed Turkey's support for Iraq's sovereignty, but asserted that, according to international law, Iraq is obliged to control the terrorist threat emanating from within its borders. "On that basis," Sinirlioglu concluded, "we can act inside Iraq to protect ourselves." An effective action plan, he argued, would obviate the need for unilateral Turkish military action. Atalay reinforced that point, emphasizing Turkey's preference for collaboration with the USG and KRG against the PKK, but that, with or without external support, "we are determined to bring an end to this."

8. (C) Odierno responded unambiguously, saying the United States recognizes and fully supports Iraq's sovereignty. He added Washington expects Iraq's neighbors to respect its sovereignty. All cross-border operations must be coordinated with the Iraqi government. He recognized the GoT's frustrations over Makhmour and recommended including it in the action plan as a topic of direct discussion between the Turkey and Iraq.

9. (C) Recalling the widely held GoT fear the PKK is planning a renewed campaign of violence for the March 21 Nevrus holiday, Atalay urged early joint development of the action plan. Odierno reminded the minister USF-I's over-riding priority is the security and success of the March 7 Iraqi parliamentary elections; nevertheless, he said, his staff would start developing the action plan upon their return to Baghdad.

10. (S) Deputy Chief of the Turkish General Staff General Aslan Guner expressed appreciation for ongoing U.S. intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) support to the Turkish military's PKK targeting effort. He requested a surge to 24-hour UAV coverage until June. He also requested the opportunity to integrate cross-border Turkish UAV operations into the ISR air tasking order. Complaining delays of up to 24 hours in receiving USF-I clearance to conduct cross-border artillery and aircraft operations "cost us," he requested a reduction in cross-border operation approval time. Finally, he claimed the PKK-controlled region east of the Zap River is devoid of civilian settlements. He requested the Turkish military be allowed to operate there without USF-I clearance. Addressing Guner's request for an ISR surge, Odierno said, without making a commitment, that he would try to help.

Meeting with Turkey's Chief of General Staff

11. (S) Odierno met separately February 3 with General Ilker Basbug, Chief of Turkey's General Staff. Odierno began by indicating his willingness to take another look at our operational clearance procedures for Turkish cross-border operations, based on concerns about delays raised by the Turks. He then briefed Basbug on the situation in Iraq and U.S. military plans there over the next two years. On UAV support (i.e., the Turkish request for 24/7 Predator coverage of northern Iraq target areas), Odierno said these resources are in extremely high demand; Turkey should identify critical periods for such coverage and USF-I would "do the best we can do."

12. (S) Basbug reviewed his own personal efforts since 2002 to obtain active U.S. support for Turkey's campaign against the PKK, and his disappointments about the U.S. failure to carry out direct, kinetic operations against PKK targets. Nevertheless, he cited the USG's November 2007 decision to provide targeting support intelligence as a turning point, and emphasized "only the U.S." is helping against the PKK. Basbug acknowledged Turkey needed a strategy that goes beyond "simply killing PKK fighters" and urged a move to target the top PKK leadership. Basbug said the definition of success against the PKK is not the organization's complete physical elimination but being able to lower the problem's priority on the national agenda. Basbug recognized this could not be achieved without the KRG. TGS, therefore, supported the Turkey-KRG dialogue, but, the KRG simply must do more, and the signs are not promising. Everyone must understand that sooner or later the PKK will become a threat not just to Turkey, but to the territorial integrity of Iraq. This is Turkey's motivation for increased U.S. engagement: "Don't leave a problem behind."

13. (C) Odierno responded, in the past, Iraqi Kurds had not seen the PKK as a threat; the U.S. and Turkey had to change this assessment. We now have an opportunity to do so with the KRG, he said. While the KRG will not engage in lethal operations against the PKK, it now seems more receptive to restricting the terrorists' movements and interdicting their logistics. Odierno said the KRG may also be helpful in separating irreconcilable terrorists from reconcilables. The KRG might be more willing to target a small set of hard-core irreconcilables once their former colleagues had reconciled. Odierno acknowledged defeating the PKK hinges on Barzani's willingness to do more. The KRG, he said, is now more ready to cooperate than ever and the USG will keep pushing.

14. (U) USF-I Commanding General Odierno cleared this cable.

Jeffrey

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